

# **Tales of the Shield: A Feminist Reading of Ballistic Missile Defence**

**Cristina Masters**  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Political Science  
York University

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The idea of missile defence is not a new one. It has its roots in the Reagan era with the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or what was more 'affectionately' referred to as Star Wars. On 23 March 1983, Reagan's Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security announced his intentions to develop a new system to reduce the threat of nuclear attack. The effect would be to end, or at least modify, the strategy of mutual deterrence (MAD). In the address, Reagan asked his fellow Americans the question: 'What if free people could live secure in the knowledge...that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our soil...?' With the answer to this question in mind, this new defence initiative, Reagan argued, was based on a simple premise: 'The United States does not start fights. We will never be an aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression – to preserve freedom and peace. Since the dawn of the atomic age, we've sought to reduce the risk of war by maintaining a strong deterrent and by seeking genuine arms control. "Deterrence" means simply this: making sure any adversary who thinks about attacking the United States, or our allies, or our vital interest, concludes that the risks to him outweigh any potential gains. Once he understands that – he won't attack. We maintain the peace through our strength; weakness only invites aggression.'

Fast-forward to the present, and it appears that Reagan's dream is finally coming to fruition. On 13 December 2001, 18 years after Reagan's address to the nation, President George W. Bush announced to the world the United States' intention to extricate itself from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, effectively putting an end to cold war politics of mutually assured destruction, and on 29 January 2002, George W. Bush's State of the Union Address emphatically stated his intention to move decisively forward with the development and deployment of missile defences to 'protect America and its allies from sudden attack.' In so many eerie ways, President Bush's address to the nation echoed Reagan's same very sentiments of 18 years earlier, with the minor exception that it is no longer the Soviet Union as the empire of evil from which American freedom needs to be protected, but the new Axis of Evil – North Korea, Iran, Iraq and their terrorist allies – who threaten the peace of the world with their desire to develop weapons of mass destruction, and who now pose the new, grave, and growing danger to American freedom.

Prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> – the date by which we now frame discussions – debates around missile defence, whether national or transnational, were framed around two central points: what I call the 'can it work' and 'should we or should we not do it' debates. In regards to the first debate, the questions have been around the technological feasibility of a ballistic missile defence system. With one side arguing that it can in fact work if the commitment of time and money is put in, and the other side arguing that not only will the cost be prohibitive, but more importantly, the technological capabilities are not available even if the budget commitments are. Moreover, the time frame of putting in place even a limited ballistic missile defence system – a minimum of ten years but most likely in the 20-25 year range – undermines the stated urgency of the program (Folger 2001; Sirak 2001). The second debate, while concerned with the technological feasibility of missile defence, has been more focussed on the 'politics' of ballistic missile defence with the central questions being whether or not the threat of missile attack by 'rogue' states is indeed real or sufficient enough to warrant the construction of a defence shield (Harvey 2000;

Mutimer 2001). This debate has also raised questions concerning what the effects will be as a consequence of proceeding to a missile defence program, with the potential of setting off an international arms race with China and Russia at the forefront.

### *Text(tures)*

Without a doubt this is a rather simplistic rendition of two strands of rich and complex debates around the technologies and politics of missile defence, but for good reason – this is neither the space nor the place through which I wish to enter into the politics of missile defence. Alternatively, I wish to enter into the fray at the level of the everyday – how people in their everyday lives pass through these larger, more exclusionary debates – ‘passing’ through not passively but through displacements and rearticulations – in the same ways when we move, we displace, shift, and recycle the air in and around us. How is it that we take the words of missile defence (re)circulated by policy and academic communities and make them our own – how do we take the metaphor of the shield, inflate it, deflate it, eat it up, regurgitate it, and sometimes spit it out?

Entering at the level of the everyday suggests that this thing named missile defence, is not simply contained within the walls of government or academia – that the practical and formal, respectively, spill *into* (and importantly, often spill *from*) the popular (Latham, 6 February 2003). The everyday, thus the popular, lurch us into spaces and places wherein our linguistic acrobatics as academics and policy makers make very little sense. Most people do not sit down and sift through academic journals, or government policy documents; instead they enter into these debates through popular mediums – news programs, newspapers, editorial cartoons, *Time* magazine, *The Economist*, and the like. These mediums do not simply transpose the discourses operating at the academic and policy levels, they engage in their own interpretations in such a way as to make them more accessible to the everyday. This is how the words that get filtered down to the everyday, recursively constituted, matter to the politics of missile defence. These texts, and textures of popular instantiations of missile defence, matter to how it is being constituted at the level of the everyday, what stories are being circulated, what they are saying implicitly about those who need to be protected and those from whom we need protection.

Too often we forget, as academics and policy makers, that the spaces and places within which international politics largely get made, are in the everyday. Television shows such as the *West Wing* probably do much more to constitute people’s understanding of foreign policy than State of the Union addresses; 24 probably does much more to constitute people’s understanding of the war on terror than White House press briefings. Most everyday people do not know what a ‘ballistic missile’ is, but they know that there are people out there who may want to use ‘them’ against ‘us.’ What everyday people do understand, is the idea of a ‘shield’(see Table 1). The metaphor of the shield vibrates through these often disparate spaces as a nexus of understanding that bridges the formal, the practical, and the popular. What gets taken up at the level of the everyday matters for how we claim to know, legitimate, justify, and/or

critique the politics of missile defence. My primary interest in the politics of ballistic missile defence is how the metaphor of the shield frames, while not entirely enclosing, the range of possibilities for how we can think of missile defence in the everyday. To imagine how one removed from the formal discourse of missile defence comes to know it, participate in it, and instantiate it in the everyday. But first with the formalities...

### ***Form(alities)***

Missile defence, dating back to Reagan's SDI, has mostly been about words, especially when we consider that there is yet no concrete reality to missile defence (outside of some tests, the majority of which have failed). Instead ballistic missile defence (BMD) has operated fundamentally at the level of discourse. Discourses, however, that are not open to everyone and prove rather difficult to enter into if one is not already part of the exclusive 'club' of missile defence experts: defence intellectuals and academics, military personnel, and government officials. If one is ostensibly 'outside' of the exclusive club, or if one is unfamiliar with or does not know the specialised language in and around missile defence and nuclear weapons (specialised languages that are now fundamentally intertwined) it *a priori* limits who can speak, and importantly what one can then say. If one does not know the specialised language of ballistic missile defence – booster phase, midcourse, exo-atmospheric kill vehicle, hit-to-kill interceptor, land-based, sea-based, air-based – and what this all means and then some, it proves rather difficult to enter into the debate. It also has implications for who gets taken seriously. A selected list of ballistic missile terminology taken from the U.S. Department of Defense's Missile Defense Agency (Table 2), illustrates these points. This small selection of missile defence discourse reflects how difficult it would be to enter into debates around ballistic missile defence if one is unfamiliar with the language. If one heard the word 'ked,' 'bus,' 'penaid,' or 'RV,' one would most likely assume the references would be to the popular tennis shoe, a yellow school bus, a pocket protector for pens, or a recreation vehicle, respectively, certainly not to 'kill enhancement devices,' 'post-boost' vehicles, missile 'penetration aides,' or 're-entry' vehicles. As Susan Ehrlich and Ruth King (1994) argue: "language is not a neutral and transparent means of representing social realities. Rather, it is assumed that a particular vision of social reality gets inscribed in language – a vision of reality that does not serve all of its speakers equally."(59)

With specific reference to nuclear weapons and their defence, Carol Cohn (1987a) refers to this specialised language as technostrategic discourse. The term 'technostrategic' is used to "indicate the degree to which nuclear strategic language and thinking are imbued with, indeed constructed out of modes of thinking that are associated with technology."(6n) This specialised discourse however, has also been deeply embedded in larger discourses of gender, sexuality, and identity, and the 'vision of reality' inscribed in technostrategic discourse is decidedly heterosexual and masculine – "White men in ties discussing missile size"(Cohn 1987a:692). To be sure, the specialised language of missile defence is not necessarily instrumentally conceived; it was not produced with the intention to exclude, sexualise, or

masculinise talk of missiles and defence, even though this has undoubtedly been the very effect of these discursive practices. Instead, as Carol Cohn suggests, this discourse has taken on this particular configuration because in order to talk about nuclear weapons, both in their use and protection, necessitates a radical removal from the very reality of the talk, because to talk about the ‘real’ realities of nuclear weapons would fundamentally undermine one’s ability to speak of missile defence in any dispassionate way. As Cohn (1987b) writes:

What [technostrategic discourse] reveals is a whole series of culturally grounded and culturally acceptable mechanisms that make it possible to work in institutions that foster the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to plan mass incinerations of millions of human beings for a living. Language that is abstract, sanitized, full of euphemisms; language that is sexy and fun to use; paradigms whose referent is weapons; imagery that domesticates and deflates the forces of mass destruction; imagery that reverses sentient and nonsentient matter, that conflates birth and death, destruction and creation – all of these are part of what makes it possible to be radically removed for the reality of what one is talking about, and from the realities one is creating through the discourse. (24)

To reflect on how gender and sexuality are inscribed by and in missile defence language, we need only refer back to the selected glossary of terms, wherein the imagery and metaphor of the phallus figures prominently in this institutionalised discourse. References to ‘patting the bomb,’ ‘putting the nicest missile into the nicest hole,’ ‘penetration,’ ‘enabling devices,’ ‘thrust-to-weight ratios,’ missile ‘warheads,’ ‘hardness,’ percentage of megatonnage as ‘orgasmic whump,’ and ‘erector’ platforms, to name but a few, not only represent, but also are reproductive of gendered and sexualised identities, but more specifically the constitution of ‘homoeerotic’ heterosexual masculinity with missiles as the referent object (Cohn 1987a: 692-6; Cohn 1987b: 24). This discourse (re)produces and (re)articulates ‘truths’ about masculinity and sexuality through the imagery and metaphors evoked in the language, wherein weapons have become marked as one of the key sites upon which hegemonic heterosexual masculinity has been intimately inscribed. In the case of the United States, its military prowess is indeed the very representation of its hegemonic identity.

It is important to reflect back on Carol Cohn’s arguments, now fifteen years past, to recognise how technostrategic discourses of the nuclear age have ostensibly morphed into one with the discursive practices of ballistic missile defence, with only a few minor twists. To talk about ballistic missile defence is to talk about nuclear weapons, both in their protection but also significantly in their use. What is utterly amazing, if not entirely surprising, is how in the popular, but also the formal discourses of missile defence, this has been profoundly silenced. Of course, not on the part of those willing or planning to use ballistic missiles against ‘us,’ but specifically in reference to the U.S.. In all my reading on missile defence I often felt there was something profound missing in the debates, something elusive that I could not quite put my finger on. Perhaps this simply reflects my *naïveté*, my desire to make explicit what is already implicit in these texts. I wonder, while I sit here and write these words, if people in the everyday

know that the possibilities signified through missile defence include the possibility of nuclear war – how conveniently we rewrite and (dis)remember our historical presents. We forget, it seems rather too easily, that the first version of ballistic missile defence, Reagan's SDI, was conceived during the height of Cold War fears of nuclear holocaust.

### **Temporal Aporias**

The temporal aporias seem to abound in contemporary debates around ballistic missile defence. While we seemingly have displaced our collective memories in and around the 'birth' of missile defence, at the same time we have displaced contemporary renditions of missile defence back (in)to the future. The debates have this odd temporal dimension to them as though we are simply talking about something in the future, something that has yet to occur, whether in the near or distant future really does not matter. I say this because when we talk about whether we should or should not do something, what gets occluded, and indeed obfuscated is how in asking the questions, in naming the thing, in some ways, it already is. The 'should we or should we not debate,' never asks the question: how is ballistic missile defence and the desire for a protective shield already working? In saying this, I obviously do not mean in the technical or technological sense, but in the sense of how it is already working in our political imaginary, how it is already working to construct how we understand our reality, ourselves, and others in the world.

Saying that ballistic missile defence is already working in our political imaginary, is suggesting that the operation of a 'missile defence shield' is not simply about the realisation of its material self, but significantly how it is already operating through the metaphors and images evoked in the naming (Orford 1999). Understanding the "metaphoric effect with the production of meaning itself, that is...the very life of language or thought in general"(Stellardi 2000:21). Metaphors and imagery are not merely inert devices which aid description and explanation, rather they are doing discursive work through their significations and circulations.

Analysis of the metaphorical basis of security policy can thus serve to reveal the constructed nature of international security. It is a construction of the imagination. It therefore matters a great deal who is doing the imagining, and what the implications are of the resultant image...Ultimately, the analysis of metaphor is a route to the opening up of alternatives in international security, alternatives that are rooted in the commitments of those making the choice of metaphors (Mutimer 1997:216).

This particular understanding of metaphor moves away from work on metaphors by Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1980), because their structuralist/functionalist approach read metaphors as instruments of language and discourse – as 'governing' thought – rather than as themselves constitutive of social reality. Lakoff and Johnson assume a transparency and coherence to metaphors which reflect a strict intentionality on the part of the speaker, but metaphors are not always coherent, and do not always perfectly reflect what was initially intended in their usage. Part of the problem in Lakoff and Johnson's theorisations of metaphors is the decontextualised nature in which they are understood, wherein what is missed is that the same metaphor can inscribe multiple meanings in different contexts and importantly in

the same context, as we will soon see. Put simply, Kennedy (2000) argues that while Lakoff and Johnson's "proposed theory of metaphor...appears to fit well with their chosen examples...real world examples are messier." (254) And this is most certainly the case with missile defence and the metaphor of the shield. Thus, by reading through the metaphors and imagery implicitly evoked in discourses of ballistic missile defence "we can see how the imagery informs the thought, and how it can operate in some ways independently of what is going on at the level of explicit... doctrine" (Lloyd 2000:28). The imagery and metaphors of missile defence, the *guiding fictions*, often tell more interesting stories, and these are the narratives, which I find most revealing about the politics of missile defence (28).

For instance, if we reflect back on Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, this policy operated on at least two different levels. First, it operated at the level of how the United States engaged with the Soviet Union at the time; it shaped American and Soviet foreign policy, it shaped the politics of containment, and constituted and reflected a heightened sense of impending doom and threat of nuclear holocaust. However, SDI also operated at the level of *Star Wars*, and the imagery and metaphors employed in understanding the desire and need for strategic missile defence. The imagery and metaphors of *Star Wars*, based on the popular film, evinced a narrative of good versus evil – the Alliance, good Jedi knights, Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker, and Han Solo – attempting to restore justice to the galaxy by rebelling against the evil Imperial forces led by Darth Vader and a seemingly never ending number of storm troopers. It was the imagery and metaphors of *Star Wars*, not really SDI, which constituted the American political imaginary of the Reagan era. One only need ask Americans what SDI is and most would likely respond with a blank stare, but if you asked about Reagan and the *Star Wars* program, I am quite sure the response would be radically different.



Jeff Parker



Daryl Cagle



Mike Lane

Certainly, the imagery and metaphors of *Star Wars* continue to play a constitutive role in our political imaginary with the renewal of ballistic missile defence, and particularly with the re-release of the original trilogy several years ago and the more recent release of *Phantom Menace: Star Wars Episode I*. But importantly there is another significant metaphor and image at play in contemporary narratives of ballistic missile defence –

that of the ‘shield.’ Indeed, ballistic missile defence as shield has operated in a multiplicity of ways to constitute our political imaginary, which are often competing and contradictory, and the shield as metaphor engages in a variety of representations that are not monolithic by any stretch of the imagination, but the stories they tell are definitely worth hearing.

### **Tales of the Shield**

The simple dictionary definition of shield as noun is a person or thing that provides protection, a protective device or structure. The shield as noun, for instance, has operated in our political imaginary through the image of the umbrella in which all those beneath the umbrella are supposed to be protected. Indeed the image of the umbrella has proliferated especially in popular discourses of missile defence. So much so that the Public Broadcasting Station’s *Newshour*, has a special section directly marketed towards elementary school students entitled ‘News for Students.’ In a particular *Newshour* special on missile defence, the ‘News for Students’ section informed children to think of Bush’s National Missile Defence Program specifically as an ‘umbrella.’ In their words: “missile defense would work like a giant umbrella, protecting the U.S. from incoming missiles. Using sophisticated radar systems and interceptor missiles the system would detect and destroy incoming missiles before they hit” (Public Broadcasting Station 2001). Much like a video game, BMD as shield, as umbrella, has encoded missile defence as this rather benign thing, umbrellas are not particularly dangerous or threatening (we can see this in the technostrategic rhetoric of missile defence as a defensive versus offensive weapons system), while at the same time constituting those underneath the umbrella as the referent objects of the protection provided by the shield. In another way, it has also had the effect of instantiating BMD as something that is only to be used for rainy days, and just as we all keep umbrellas in our closets only to be brought out in the event of rain, so BMD is portrayed as something only to be used on those very same rainy days. The problem however, is that it does not always rain when we think it will and often we forget our umbrellas at home anyway.





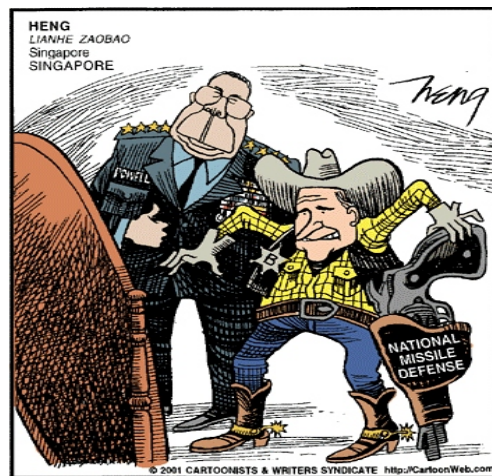
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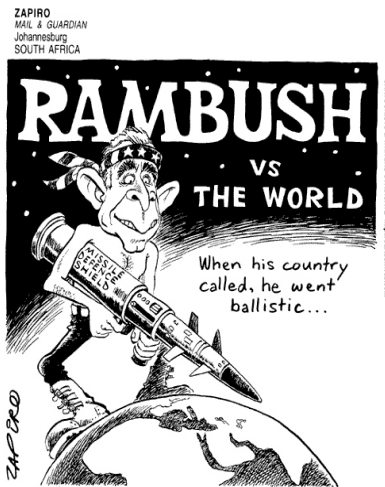
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The shield as a person who provides protection can also be read in the politics of BMD as law enforcement. Police badges are often referred to as ‘shields’ where the person with the badge has the official, legitimate, and coercive authority to provide protection. ‘To serve and protect’ as articulated through the shield, in similar ways to the umbrella, has had the effect of inscribing the ‘public’ as the referent object of BMD. The one wearing the badge/shield and thus carrying the metaphorical weapon of law enforcement becomes merely an instrument of protection in his duty to uphold the law, and it is only in breaking the law that one will be punished. The shield as badge, thus as legal and lawful, confers a

strong sense of legitimacy to BMD. The problem however, is that what it is protecting against, the threat of a ballistic missile attack from a so-called rogue state, is in effect criminalising the offender before the offence has been committed. Instead of being innocent until proven guilty, the missile shield as badge, as law enforcement ostensibly constitutes the rogue 'other' as guilty until proven innocent, or just simply guilty. What is interesting about this particular reading of the metaphor is reflected in critiques of BMD which suggest that missile defence is in effect constructing the reality of threat, rather than merely responding to threats 'out there' in the international arena (for a discussion on the construction of threat, see Mutimer 2001; Campbell 1998).

On the other hand, shield as verb inscribes the umbrella a little bit differently. The shield as verb, thus a shielded, shielding, or shields, is defined as to protect or defend or guard with, or as if with a shield. As a verb, the effect is the constitution of BMD as a more involved process where there is a doer behind the deed, and the deed is being done against something or someone. But what or who is being acted against still remains rather obscure, whereas the subject or agent doing the action is on display. However, shield as verb also signifies to cover up or conceal, telling a different narrative than the two previous ones. The shield as covering up or concealing suggests there is something to hide, and this is where the metaphorical story of BMD as shield gets a little more interesting, and as we will recall from earlier in the paper that metaphors and imagery often work independently of official doctrine. Once they are 'out there,' there is at least an extent to which official doctrine loses control over its own metaphors.

So how does shield as covering up and concealment operate in our political imaginary of BMD? I want to suggest that, in this instance, the shield reveals a crucial dimension of the politics of missile defence so far absent in the narrative, and that is the politics of identity, or more to the point, identity insecurity. It is at this moment that what is actually being protected by BMD becomes of the utmost significance. Ballistic missile defence is specifically about protecting some weapons from other weapons with more weapons, and not specifically, or at all about protecting people, but rather the projection/protection of the American body politic. The referent object of BMD is the American nuclear arsenal, a nuclear arsenal that seemingly now is insufficient to provide protection for the American body politic. The irony of this is utterly profound because if we reflect back on cold war discourses nuclear weapons were constituted as the embodiment, indeed the very representation of American hegemonic masculine identity, but an identity now so obviously in crisis by its very need and desire for protection and concealment.



Zapiro



Matt Wuerker

The two editorial cartoons above tell a story of an American identity in crisis – a story of desire for the ever elusive secure identity. The one cartoon narrates a story of Bush’s desire to be something he is not, the not of course being the muscle-bound body of Sylvester Stallone as Rambo. With the American flag wrapped around his forehead, his anti-ballistic missile in hand, ‘Rambush’ is ready to take on the world, all in the name of country. The body of ‘Rambush,’ however, doesn’t ‘cut it’ and appears wholly inadequate for the job. To strip ‘Rambush’ of his anti-ballistic missile would leave us with little more than a spindly body (politic) too diminutive for Rambo’s ‘britches.’ The other cartoon narrates the body of President Bush as ‘sheathed’ in an anti-ballistic missile, shooting down all that challenges American hegemony and in effect concealing the very inadequacy narrated through the body of ‘Rambush.’ The subtext of both cartoons is that it is only through BMD, as the performative script, that American identity can be (re)covered.

It is America’s move into the seems-to space of desire that it desperately hopes to conceal from itself; for its move into this space is not recognized or made conscious of in American foreign-policy discourse, and, if made conscious, it would disrupt the claims to straight hegemonic masculinity the American body politic forever seems to be making.(Weber 1999:136)

But this is not by any means the end of the narrative, because the desire and need to protect nuclear weapons is not intended to make the American body politic impotent. In the words of the *New York Times* editor: “The key motivation for missile defence supporters is, the desire to preserve United States freedom of action, meaning that the threat of missile attack should not deter the United States from intervening around the world” (Keller 2001). Although the arguments around the threat of rogue states are not entirely convincing, this argument, I think, captures precisely the American desire and need for ballistic missile defence – the desire and need for a refashioned American body politic. In the words of Cynthia Weber (1999): “America’s body politic can and must be worn by every American – U.S. and

other – for an imaginary America constructs the identities of all Americans but seemingly belongs to no American in particular.” (6) It is precisely in this moment – the moment of desire – where the metaphor of the shield can also, and should be, read through the prophylactic. The fashioning of the shield as prophylactic, operates and constitutes a political imaginary of an American body politic that does not fundamentally disenable America’s performance on the world stage. Instead, this enabling device as shield allows America’s identity crisis to be concealed while simultaneously allowing for its rearticulation and reinvigoration. This identity insecurity imaginary is revealed and very much marked on the body of George W. Bush, a body very much in need of a new performative script. A performative script which masquerades a ‘misunderestimated’ American president, and an electoral fiasco that inaugurated a President not with a bang, but by the dangling of a ‘chad.’

The shield as prophylactic, thus, operates in several ways, and as a protective device it operates in at least two ways: first, it protects against impregnation, and second, it protects against disease. Through this metaphor and image, implicit discursive representations are being advanced and circulated in our political imaginary. The story being told is one of desire, the desire to still engage in penetrating activities without the responsibilities entailed by such desires, revealing the United States’ unwillingness to give up particular activities, but also the unwillingness to be responsible for its actions. At the same time, a story is being told about the ‘other,’ the one who is being penetrated, the one we fear may penetrate ‘us.’ The story is one of disease and infection, the ‘other’ as potentially infectious, dirty, impure, and disease ridden; it is a story about the self and the other which is fundamentally marked by race, good versus evil, white versus black.

While many may see this particular narrative of missile defence as a stretch, first we need to consider the power of laughter in critical engagements with the texts of missile defence.

Laughter defamiliarizes discourses and events for their readers, giving readers license to disobey common expectations about what meanings a given text ought to generate. Attention is drawn to subtexts and double meanings embedded in texts. By ‘liberating’ the interpretation of a text from the sole domain of its author’s intentions, texts are remotivated with plural interpretations (Weber 1999:8-9).

Second, we need only to remember that prophylactics are often referred to as shields. A quick field trip to one’s local pharmacy, a look into one’s wallet, medicine cabinet or bedside drawer can certainly attest to it. Moreover, in the age of AIDS pandemics the prophylactic has taken on greater meaning in protecting one from deadly diseases. The threat of contamination and the spread of contamination have entered into our political imaginary through the linguistic devices employed to represent the new threats and dangers as ‘grave and growing,’ and the places from which these threats emanate as alien lands that ‘breed’ their own truth and ‘spread’ hatred (for an example of the constitution of the other as alien, see Beck 2001). In the same ways that ‘we’ know that those who get HIV/AIDS are ‘those’ who engage in deviant sexual practices (read: homosexual), needle-shooting druggies, and ‘those’ people ‘over there’ in Africa who can’t seem to control their sexual urges. The shield as prophylactic

works to constitute the ‘other’ in these ways, in ways that explicit doctrine can’t come out directly and say, although the allusion is always present.

### **Convergences**

One may wonder why I chose editorial cartoons as a backdrop to the metaphorical workings of the shield, and cartoons that so obviously undermine, by poking fun at, the very idea of a missile defence shield. I chose these particular cartoons for several reasons, not least of which because even in their very disparagements of missile defence, they still participate in the circulation of the metaphor of the shield in its multiple instantiations. As well, and possibly of greater significance, they don’t deny the existence of a dangerous, alien Other. Think through, for instance, the cartoon of the father and son walking under an umbrella, with the father explaining how missile defence would operate. The missile defence shield, the father explains to his son, would do the same as the umbrella protecting us from ‘bird poop.’ The reality which missile defence would protect us from is likened to bird’s defecating from the sky, where the dangerous Other is marked fundamentally as not human, and also as feces. We also cannot help but notice that the one marked as protected is white, male, and decidedly heterosexual, with his son in tow as if it were ever in question – the penultimate signifier of American hegemonic identity. The narrative doesn’t stop there however, because just as the father is explaining this to his son in his paternal, simplistic and reassuring way, in his absence of fear because of the missile defence ‘plan,’ he is just about the step into (an)Other unexpected danger, the forever lurking pile of dog poop! What is not in question is the reality of a dangerous, alien Other wishing to do us harm, the question is where is it coming from – the sky or the ground. Is it the stealthy pile of rabid dog poop that happens to always be right under our feet, or is it the crazed caveman, who has yet to evolve (but who seemingly has evolved enough to construct ballistic missiles!!), coming in the back door with bomb in hand?

In the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> environment, the ‘rogue’ and ‘terrorist’ have morphed into a metatope of the alien Other. The paradox being however, that after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> many assumed, quite wrongly unfortunately, that BMD would be forever relegated to the pages of history books. September 11<sup>th</sup> proved what many had predicted prior to the attacks, that what America had to fear was not a ballistic missile attack, but rather terrorist attacks on the ground. As we know though, BMD has not been relegated to a pile of dusty history books, instead it is very much alive in the American political imaginary. What has worked to keep BMD alive in the American political imaginary, as a signifier of the body politic, is without a doubt the discursive unification of the rogue and the terrorist. To construct them as one, legitimises and justifies the desire for BMD – the attempt to not only ‘raise the drawbridge, but also to caulk every chink in the moat’(Der Derian 1995:28).

### **Possibilities**

These metaphorical narratives – these guiding fictions – circulate in our political imaginary by encoding particular presuppositions and constructions of the self and the other, a self and other who are being read and marked through discourses of race and gender. These metaphors and images not only mediate

knowledge but also produce our knowledge of people, places, and things. This is how BMD is already at work and play in the field of international security politics. The shield as umbrella has inscribed the body politic and encoded in our political imaginary the sense that 'we' are the referent objects of protection and it is with us in mind that it is being constructed. While at the same time the metaphor and imagery of the shield have also revealed the representational politics and the identity security at stake in BMD. This is not to suggest that oppositional narratives to the ones fleshed out do not exist, indeed they do, but the conversational spaces of opposition are closing as we speak and critical interventions are in some ways becoming more difficult. Reading through the narratives of the metaphors and imagery of BMD is only one of the many ways of revealing how 'truths' about ourselves and others are produced even if all that it effects in the end is a disturbance of what appears to us as natural and inevitable. However, by suggesting that BMD is already working in and through our political imaginary, we can then already begin the process of tracing its violent effects and thus challenging them along the way.

It is only through the claim that BMD is already working – discursively mapping out the terrain and bodies of self and other – that subversive interventions can be made, presenting possibilities that have so far been absent or obscured within the politics of missile defence. The possibility of taking up the ethical moment(s): "The putting into question of the self is precisely the welcome of the absolute other... To be an I then signifies not to be able to slip away from responsibility" (Levinas 1986:353). The possibilities of engaging otherwise than heretofore, of coming face to face with the other constructed in and through the I, are laid bare in revealing missile defence as a project(ion) of identity. The opportunity is before us "to articulate an ethical position which takes into account questions of self-constitution and self-transformation as the primary locations of political identities and as the necessary baseline from which we may begin to reimagine the political spaces available to us" (Jabri 1998:592). The ethical position requires that we engage in self-reflection, taking up the call of the Other, thus being responsible to the Other, not for the Other. If we consider the critiques of American foreign policy (body politic), past and present, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, most of them turned on the idea that the U.S. was somehow responsible for the event in some measure. While many have certainly advanced this critique through thoughtful and reflective engagement, what is more poignant perhaps is the critique that the American body politic has never been responsible to the multitude of Others instantiated in the inscriptions of self. We need to take seriously how BMD is engaging in representational politics that undoubtedly effect violences, erasures, and silences. We need to insert ourselves in these politics through critical engagements, to effect our own destabilisations and subversions.

**TABLE 1**

**“Missile Defence as Shield”**

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1. “Missile shield is moral requisite, US tells allies” *The Guardian* (Monday February 5, 2001).
  2. “Re-igniting the arms race: Which came first, the sword or the shield?” Quote: “In the mind of a U.S. president infatuated with building up an expensive missile defense system, it’s the shield.” *Toledo Blade* (April 5, 2002).
  3. “Political Weapons: The missile defense shield will help neutralize the tech sector” *The San Francisco Chronicle* (Thursday, January 17, 2002).
  4. “On the meeting’s first day, several Europeans criticized President Bush’s proposed “peace shield” as divisive and outmoded” *The Village Voice* (November 14 - 20, 2001).
  5. “Despite Tough Talk, Bush Needs a Deal on Missile Defense” Quote: “President Bush’s missile shield will supposedly protect Americans from “rogue states.” *Time Magazine* (Friday, August 24, 2001).
  6. “Bush Team Vows to Speed Up Work on Missile Shield” *New York Times* (April 30, 2001).
  7. “There’s No Defense For Shooting Down W.’s Missile Shield” *New York Post* (May 7, 2001): pg. 018.
  8. “Bush approach on missile defence shield resembles father’s: plans speech” *The Canadian Press* (April 30, 2001).
  9. “Powell gives OK for U.S. missile defence shield if technology works” *The Canadian Press* (February 10, 2001).
  10. “First stage of missile shield gets go-ahead” *The Globe and Mail* (December 18, 2002).
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This is a small selection of media print illustrating the prevalence of the metaphor of the ‘shield.’

TABLE 2

<b>A Selected Glossary of Missile Defence Terminology</b> ( <a href="http://www.acq.osd.mil/bmdo/bmd/bmdolink/pdf/glossary.pdf">http://www.acq.osd.mil/bmdo/bmd/bmdolink/pdf/glossary.pdf</a> , accessed 4 March 2002)	
Ballistic Missile Defense	All active and passive measures designed to detect, identify, track, and defeat attacking ballistic missiles (and entities), in both strategic and theatre tactical roles, during any portion of their flight trajectory (boost, post-boost, midcourse, or terminal) or to nullify or reduce the effectiveness of such attack.
Black Body	An ideal body which would absorb all (and reflect none) of the radiation falling upon it.
Bus	The platform (or 'bus'), sometimes referred to as a post-boost vehicle, on a single missile which carries all the warheads on that missile. May also carry penetration aids, decoys, etc.
Counterforce	The employment of strategic air and missile forces in an effort to destroy, or render impotent, selected military capabilities or an enemy force.
Erector Platform	Space, land, air, or sea based ballistic missile platforms.
Hard Kill	Destruction of a target in such a way as to produce unambiguous visible evidence of its neutralization.
Hardening	Design and manufacturing process and other measures which may be employed to render military assets less vulnerable.
HARDMAN	Hardware/Military Manpower Integration
Hardness	A property of a target; measured by the power needed per unit area to destroy the target. A hard target is more difficult to kill than a 'soft' target (i.e. people are often referred to as soft targets).
HARM	High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile
KED	Kill Enhancement Device
Leakage	The allowable threat objects passing through a BMD system expressed as a percentage of the threat. To ensure overall system of performance, permitted leakage is 'budgeted' among individual BMD phases and functions.
Leakage(max)	Maximum allowable threat.
LIP	Lethality Improvement Plan
MY	Man Year
Nuclear Hardness	A qualitative description of the resistance of a system or component to malfunction and/or degraded performance induced by a nuclear weapon environment. Hardness is measured by resistance to physical quantities such as overpressure, peak velocities, energy absorbed, and electrical stress. Hardness is achieved through adhering to appropriate design specifications and is verified by one or more test and analysis techniques.
Nuclear Survivability Characteristics	Proliferation, redundancy, avoidance, reconstitution, deception, and hardening.
Payload (missile)	The warhead, its container, and activating devices in a military missile.
Peacekeeper	US MX Missile
Penaid	Penetration Aid – Techniques and/or devices employed by offensive aerospace weapon systems to increase the probability of penetrating enemy defenses.



RVs	Re-entry Vehicles
Warhead Mating	The act of attaching a warhead section to a rocket or missile body, torpedo, airframe, motor, or guidance section.
Warhead Section	A completely assembled warhead including appropriate skin sections and related components.
Weapons Enablement	Authorization to place a weapon into its most ready state but prior to release.

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